

ON THE SARAMACCA RIVER

that we walk the Bak'a with pleasure, that he treat us well, that we walk in safety. Thank you."

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The men in the other canoes, who had gathered about Sedefo's boat, clapped their hands, as Sedefo had done, and said "Thank you," then took up their paddles.

We had noticed that when Sedefo spoke, Bibifo's lips had moved, as though he were either repeating the prayer, or speaking his own, but when the others joined in the voiced "Gran' tangi!" he was silent.

"Did you pray, Bayo?" we asked. Yes, he had. He had prayed for us, too. Did Bibifo also pray for the white man? But before Bibifo could answer, Bayo laughed aloud.

"Bibifo is *kerki suma*—a church man. Call him Adrian, it will please him. I call him Bibifo, nothing else."

"And you, Bayo?"

"I—you will take me with you to Africa. I want to learn African obia, and come back to the Saramacca, and be a big obia-man here on the river."

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Old Bibifo accepted his great-grandson's jibes with good humor. We were sorry for the old fellow who was so little at ease with the other men, and was so mercilessly twitted by the youngster in the bow.

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If the old man were to make a suggestion to him about a channel which Bayo had decided against, then he would turn brazenly, and exclaim, "Massa cow!" This is part of the proverb which says that a man who owns the cow has the best right to say where it shall graze. If Bibifo objected when Bayo attempted to do something that seemed impossible, he would face about smilingly and say, "The power which has raised the monkey from the ground and taught it to live safely in the trees is not dead yet."

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"Bibifo," we said, making conversation with the old man, "Why do we go close to the shore?"

"In the center the current is swift and the river deep. When we go in the center, then we use only paddles. It is

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REBEL DESTINY

603 were told that kambo was an abbreviated form of kam-
bosa, and meant the woman who makes trouble.

● [592] "He is my grandson, he calls me wife, and I call him
husband. We joke together about everything."

Up and down the river we heard these expressions from the old men and women with whom we talked, and to them these were all-sufficient explanations of the relationship of grandparent and grandchild. This making free was a verbal give-and-take that did not stop at brusqueness or teasing. Indeed, those who indulged in this freedom might discuss with each other any phase of the sexual life. Nor did they need to resort to any evasion or circumlocution. There seemed, moreover, to be a sanction for emphasis on the obscene and the lascivious in these conversations—obscene and lascivious, that is, from the point of view of those who were themselves speaking!

603 The effect of the custom is interesting. It acts as a form
182 of release for the young, who are held down under the strain of paying respect to those who are older and of greater experience. It is a way of escape from the discipline imposed by the parents and those of their generation.

What did the Bush Negro make of it?

We talked about it with men and women of many villages, and invariably the answer was the same.

"So we live in the bush, white man, and so we do. Our ancestors did this before us. Long ago our great ancestors brought all this knowledge with them from *Neng'e Kond'e*—from the land of the Negroes."

Yet in the beliefs of these people, and in their life as they live it, there are to be found a few suggestive hints which seem to have some bearing on this custom of verbal license between grandparents and grandchildren.

603 The Bush Negro child is given many names at birth,
[551] and one name is usually that of a departed ancestor, a deceased grandparent. It may be, then, that this puts the child on a plane of spiritual equality with his grandparents and with those of their generation who are related to him. There is, also, the feeling about the propriety of the mar-

The Game Trail

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The blacks admire the bahkra's shotgun and rifle—beautiful, well-oiled weapons which they love. They gaze through the barrel of the shotgun to see the clean bore, and make a comparison with their own meagre, fouled guns. They sniff at the rifle, however, because it shoots only one bullet. How can a man get game with a single ball? Explanations of the high power of the shell produce no effect upon them.

We load. Canned goods, rice, bacon, tobacco, coffee—enough for five days. The provisions are packed in the wicker rucksacks, along with hammocks. The start is made. Walking through the village, the packers exchange jests with Negro women who pause to watch us go by. The hunters are teased regarding the amount of game they will bring back. [522]

After a half-mile walk we reach the new cassava fields in back of the village at a quarter of six, as the sun is rising. The women are already at work. Beyond lies the game trail. It is simply a slight path through the jungle brush, with occasional pools of water through which we wade. Idle toucans eye us from nearby palm trees. A flurry in the bush off to the right indicates the escape of an agouti, but we are not quick enough to see it. The agouti is a kind of giant guinea pig, called by the natives *cony-cony*, meaning "cunning-cunning," because it is hard to outwit. The Bush Negroes are eager to get some of this sweet, succulent meat.

Within an hour the last cassava field is left far behind and we are in the "high bush." The tops of giant trees are lost to sight a hundred and fifty feet overhead. Their massive trunks are buttressed with branches that have grown back

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The Djuka had killed the tapir which had sunk. Pressed for time, he had had to leave, requesting the Asisi people to look for it.

[251] The next day Pototo and Amusupé found the animal floating
[262] between two waters. They hid it in the bush and had it smoke-dried on their own behalf. They ate it with their wives (about 100 kilos of meat).

That ended up by becoming known, and a jealous man denounced them to the grand man.

Called before the lanti kuutu, they had to apologize and were each sentenced to pay as a fine to the grand man a demijohn of 15 liters of tafia (worth about 6,000 francs) within four months.

[735] Both of them were at a loss to pay this fine, belonging to the category of ne'er-do-wells who have no regular activity and live from day to day, selling some fish or game from time to time.

[613] Amusupé appealed to Captain Konduku, head of his lineage, who agreed to pay for the tafia for him, Amusupé reimbursing him little by little.

[613] As for Pototo, the head of his lineage refused categorically
[689] to help him because he had eaten the maïpouri alone without allowing his family to share it (the village people would have found it normal to profit by the crime, but they deemed it immoral that one of their relatives had deprived them of meat). After three and a half months, Pototo began to occupy himself seriously at a paid job which he had the luck to find because we needed a bossman for two weeks.

577 The Boni did nothing but laugh while telling us this story.
626 Affairs of this kind, which do not involve any suprahuman inter-
[522] vention, escape in large measure their social morality; they have a certain feeling for what should be done, but submit to it only in proportion as they fear a material and immediate sanction.

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[577] (the best), Poyman (strong man), etc.; along the same line names are often given such as Goutu uman (golden woman);

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522 --Often, finally, the name is the contraction of a short sentence expressing a joke or a ridiculous association of ideas:

Agimianèm (give me a name), Nâfiimoo (it is no longer for you), Afumidichi (that one is for me), Sanidialobi (thing he likes), Agoabuchi (he goes into the bush), etc.

Woochia is the contraction of sa u si ya? (what shall we see there?), expressing the surprise of a woman who was seeing herself pregnant for the first time after 15 years of sterile marriage.

/125/ In this kind of name, in several cases it is a question of a joke with respect to the child, for which he will have to suffer all his life.

Ex.: Amoyanéti (he is pretty in the night), name given to a child who was very ugly.

Poété (convict) is the pikin nēm of B..., a man about 42 years old in 1957; he never clearly understood why his mother had given him that name which he could not get rid of, his comrades taking malicious pleasure in calling him by his pikin nēm.

This bad joke had so much success that it was put into circulation two more times: in Boni country there are now two Poété and a /female/ Poétéuman!

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[522] This example, associated with many others, shows the casualness with which the Refugee Blacks choose their children's names. We have been present several times at discussions concerning the choice of these names; they proceed in an atmosphere of crude farce. B..., with whom we have just been concerned, who had had to suffer from the name his mother had given him, called one of his nephews Canada because it is the country in which are manufactured Evinrude motors which he admired very much.

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About eight o'clock in the evening; people assemble around the mortuary shed where the drummers and mato (Anansi Toli) storytellers sit. Amëmbé, of Loka village, begins to tell a story which is scarcely listened to, the audience remaining noisy and distracted. The respondents punctuate his discourse with approbations: "hiya ba! na so!" At several passages of the story (when Anansi has succeeded in deceiving his victim), the audience shakes with laughter, the drums beat, the storyteller and his respondents sing and dance. Little by little the audience warms up, participates intensely in the story.

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Another tale follows, told by Adiiso, head of the Dju lineage (Asisi). The audience is overexcited, the interludes of dancing become more and more numerous and longer, everybody, men, women, and children take part in it.

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About eleven o'clock the dances are going to begin in the order susa, sōngé, awasa; at six /186/ o'clock in the morning the next day the awasa dances are carried on. Part of those present go down to the wharf to go home, showing no apparent fatigue.

Fifth day, Nov. 12. Nothing happens in the morning. The people take some rest.

At 3:00 P.M. the young men go around dressed up to the nines; people visit each other from one house to the other, they drink and sing.

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About 3:30 the basia circulate in the village, calling the women to bring the ceremonial meal. Tables are set out under the shed. The women each bring a big bowl or basin of cooked rice (about two kilograms of rice). Some add a bowl of sauce or cooked fish. No meat.

The basia lay out all that on the tables. There are about 30 bowls or basins (which represents a handsome effort, the rice harvest having been bad), about 50 bottles of soda, several boxes of pastries /biscuits/ and Dutch cheeses.

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[789] containing seeds). Sometimes, when a god has entered a pupil, the teacher puts the latter's passivity to the test by insulting the god with the help of the drum. The Kumēnti gets angry, breaks bottles and swallows ground glass, walks in the fire, hits himself with machete blows, all without any wound resulting, they say, on the body of its bearer.

[302] These frenzied dances, whose participants completely covered with pemba (white clay) are as if hallucinated, have a bizarre aspect which is perceptible to some of the Boni themselves. They do not have any secret character and constitute, on the contrary, a fine spectacle for the village people. The spectators double up with laughter at the contortions and strange actions which the gods inspire in those possessed. They are talked about at length /207/ afterward in the evenings, humorists imitating what they saw done there, without any fear whatever of irritating the gods.

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346 Each "teacher for Kumēnti" owns a small gadu osu in which are lined up the implements of the cult. One finds in general in these chapels a post crudely carved in the shape of a human bust, a block of stone, jaguar skulls, some kəkoti (shrub stalks with a spontaneous double bend, thought to be the prop of spirits in the bush), and a saka (maraka), the whole sprinkled with white clay (pemba). One finds also beside the door a seat and a trough which are used for the ablutions of the pupils.

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788 While bathing his body with the infusion of leaves prepared by the teacher, the neophyte repeats, in ordinary language, a series of invocations: "Come to me, enter into me. But before entering into me, it is necessary to teach me the things of thy country; O God, when thou art in me, may I be able to dance on broken glass without its cutting me; may I be able to dance in fire without its burning me. If tomorrow someone takes a machete to hurt me, he shall not be able to come forward. If someone takes a gun to shoot me, (his weapon) must break, must not be able to take off. If someone is sick, make an obia for him, he must recover."

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Doubtless for the same reason, nothing is found in most of these tales which brings to mind a moral inspired by a concept of good and evil. Now it is the thief and the swindler who triumph, now they find one cleverer than they. It is easy to see that for the storyteller all that is on the same plane; he simply guided his story on what seemed to him most amusing.

- [522] As for the audience, it always laughs at the loser. One single tale out of 14 (No. 1) expresses a practical moral: "That is why you must not deceive people, for there are people who are cleverer than you."

Most of the tales and proverbs have already been heard many a time by the Refugee Blacks without that lessening their pleasure. More than the story itself, they appreciate the verve of the storyteller, his mimicking talent, the always new variations he knows how to give of a hackneyed theme.

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[126] All these tales were recorded with the tape recorder and then were studied carefully with respect to vocabulary and syntax. We have stayed very close to the actual wording and as far as possible have kept the special Aluku turns of phrase, especially African interjections which reinforce the verbs. The tedious passages which had to be summarized are put in parentheses. Tales nos. ten to 14 are summarized.

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Tales

1) The Bearded Rock

One day Anansi went into the bush. He walked until ... he saw a rock, a rock with a beard. He cried: "Bearded rock!"

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12) The Brother, the Sister, and the King (summarized)

There was a brother and sister. They were in the greatest poverty. They went through the country looking for work, until they arrived at the king's home. The king told them: "You are looking for something to live on; I wish to see a little elephant, I have never yet been able to see one. Find one and bring it to me, I shall reward you."

Then the brother said to the sister: "I am going to cover thee with cloth, hide thy head, fasten a rope around thy waist."

This he did, and they went on the road to the king's house.

She turned her back to the king and while her brother held her at the end of a rope, danced, as I shall show you.

• (522) (The narrator executes a burlesque dance, bent over double, his back turned toward the spectators who shake with laughter.)

Then the king said: "I don't need to see the front of the elephant, he is too ugly."

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13) Anansi and the Toclo Partridge

The toclo partridge had made a large clearing. Since she used to go to it by flying, she had made no path for going there. One day Anansi passed by, he saw this clearing in the middle of the uninhabited forest, without any road leading to it. He said: "It is God who has made this clearing for me," and he marked out a wide path from the clearing to his house. The partridge arrived unexpectedly and said to him: "It was I who made this clearing." Anansi said to her: "I do not believe you; if it had been you who made the clearing, there would be a road."